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AUTHOR Rayburn, Carole A.; And Others
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ABSTRACT

Clergymen have been facing new challenges and stresses resulting from greater numbers of women entering seminaries and positions of religious leadership. In this study, 54 Roman Catholic priests and 50 brothers were given the specially devised Religion and Stress Questionnaire to explore their sensitivity towards some of the gender issues important to religious leaders today. While these two groups did show some receptivity to thinking along non-traditional lines in terms of understanding the problems and being willing to change something in the system to improve matters, they still have much to resolve. Priests were more sensitive than brothers about the possibility that women may be treated as novelties in the seminary; have far less opportunity for recruitment interviews and hiring; and would be blamed for going against tradition. Brothers were able to see women's possible discomfort being a sexual minority as leaders of congregations. Priests can use counselors and psychotherapists to help them become more understanding about women's issues. Clergymen can use questionnaires to become knowledgeable about their biases and thus become better pastoral counselors. (Survey instrument and results table are included.) (ABL)

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PRIESTS, BROTHERS, AND THE RELIGION AND STRESS QUESTIONNAIRE

Carole A. Rayburn, Lee J. Richmond, and Lynn Rogers

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ABSTRACT--PRIESTS, BROTHERS, AND THE RELIGION AND STRESS QUESTIONNAIRE

The entrance of larger numbers of women into religious leadership positions, in what is still a male-dominated field, has brought with it stress and strain on both women and men in the field. In this study, 54 Roman Catholic (male) priests and 50 brothers were given the specially devised Religion and Stress Questionnaire to explore their sensitivity towards some of the gender issues important to women and men of today. While these two groups did show some receptivity to thinking along non-traditional lines in terms of understanding the problems and being willing to change something in the system to improve matters, they still have much to resolve. It is suggested that such questionnaires help to increase awareness of the problems confronted by men and women concerning gender issues; that such frontline individuals whom others turn to seem to need to turn to counseling psychologists, all well versed in the psychology of women and ideally in the psychology of religion, as well as in the psychology of religious women; and that this kind of resource would eventuate in better role-modeling and pastoral counseling of religious leaders toward congregants and other religious professionals.

PRIESTS, BROTHERS, AND THE RELIGION AND STRESS QUESTIONNAIRE

Carole A. Rayburn, Ph.D.
Silver Spring, Md.

Lee J. Richmond, Ph.D.
Johns Hopkins University

Lynn Rogers, Ed.D. Cand.
Johns Hopkins University

INTRODUCTION

In the Roman Catholic Church, priests and brothers are religious leaders who fill very different functions. Priests may teach, work in hospitals, and become involved in any number of professional pursuits. However, they are also involved in that which defines their priestly ministry, the celebration of the sacraments of the church. Brothers most usually teach, work in hospitals, or assist priests. Where they are most likely to find their paths crossing is in the area of pastoral counseling. Further, both groups of men in their lifetimes will influence large numbers of youth, especially males. Is is vital, therefore, that they understand and adequately deal with some of the pressing gender issues of today. Unless they are aware of these concerns and their own and others' stresses about the concerns, they may well pass stereotypical mythologies onto others, both male and female, which will seriously hamper others' self-actualization and pursuit of wholeness.

Clergymen in general have been facing new challenges and stresses with the greater numbers of women who have been entering seminaries and positions of religious leadership. In the Roman Catholic Church, the pope has declared that women cannot

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be ordained priests because Christ is a male and thus women cannot ever image Christ as priests must. Nonetheless, there are groups of nuns, such as the National Coalition of American Nuns and the Women's Ordination Conference, plus the group of priests, Priests for Equality, which have espoused an ordained priesthood for women. Growing numbers of the Roman Catholic congregation, both men and women, have risen up to proclaim the joys and hopes of equality for men and women, not excluding roles within the religious sphere. More and more people may be requesting or even demanding that such equality be reflected in inclusive language of liturgies, theology, scripture, and hymnals (Brooten, 1977; Carroll, 1980; Daly, 1975; Holcomb, 1975; Irving, 1980; Menne, 1980; Mollenkott, 1974; Raming, 1980; Rayburn, 1981, 1984, 1985 a, b; Rayburn, Natale, & Linzer, 1982; Ruether, 1975).

To the extent that male religious leaders are unable to bring the new into line with the more traditional, they may well experience stress and strain. How successful male religious leaders are in being aware of and demonstrating their sensitivity to the needs of their female congregants will enter the overall picture of stress and coping resources for clergy and congregation. Religious leaders who hope to aid others in exploring the fullness of their personhood must be willing to thoroughly analyze any biases of their own and of their church's against women and their assumption of fuller participation in life in general and in the church in specific.

In the present study, a specially devised paper and pencil questionnaire about some of the areas of stress concerning women and reactions towards some gender issues was employed. This was used as an aid to get the men in touch more with their thoughts

and feelings about women, gender roles, and stresses and strains on men and women who have yet much to learn about coping with one another. Such awareness would form a solid basis for doing better counseling, psychotherapy, referral for counseling and psychotherapy, and simply more effective and balanced role-modelling for those with whom they are in contact.

METHODOLOGY

The Religion and Stress Questionnaire, devised by Rayburn and Richmond (1982), was used to study the responses of the priests and brothers. Both groups were drawn from a large metropolitan area. There were 54 priests and 50 brothers. For the priests, the mean age was 44.2 years, with a wide range of 29 to 70 years. The average years of experience as a religious leader was 8.3 years, with a very wide range of six months to 36 years and five months. For the brothers, the mean age was 42.3 years, with a range of 26 to 72 years. The mean years of experience on the job was 7.2 years, with a range of three months to 29 years. Thus, the priests were older than the brothers, as a group, and they had more years of experience working as religious leaders. Most of the priests had parish responsibilities, while the brothers were primarily teachers (though there were a few who reported being administrators, a high-school guidance director, a personnel director, a psychotherapist, a social worker, and a supervisor of a household).

The 16 item Religion and Stress Questionnaire had the following questions:

1. Do you think women sense more need to excel than men?
2. What effect do you think being in a sexual minority has upon female seminarians, ministers, priests, and rabbis?

3. Do you have any experience of women being treated as a novelty to be tolerated in seminary?

4. Do women have equal opportunities for recruitment interviews and actual hiring on church/synagogue staffs?

5. What pressures do you think women feel who are in high levels of leadership?

6. Do you think women experience suspicion or rejection from colleagues and/or congregations?

7. Because they dare to be female leaders in a predominantly male enterprise, do you think they get blamed for going against the tide?

8. How do women experience stress from institutional and personal pressure at work?

9. How do women handle work-related stress?

10. Do you think women handle stress differently than their male counterparts?

11a. What do you think about using less gender-bound language in church/synagogue texts and hymnals?

11b. Do you plan to use more inclusive language for men and women when you work in your religious setting?

11c. Is there any change in language that is particularly offensive to you?

12a. What do you think and feel about women in ministry/rabbinate/congregation using their birth names?

12b. For women, would you prefer to use your birth name?

12c. Is your religious setting accepting of women using their birth names?

These items were developed and reported in Rayburn, Richmond, and Rogers (1982) and in later studies (1983, 1986).

RESULTS

On an item concerning women preferring to use their birth names, the priests and brothers answered from their vantage point of what they would prefer. The priests were more sensitive to women's sensing more need to excel, to their being treated as novelties to be tolerated in seminary, to there being fewer recruitment and hiring opportunities for women, and to women being blamed for going against the tide.

The brothers were more sensitive to women's experiencing a negative effect by being religious leaders and a sexual minority, in personally planning to use more inclusive language, about women in religious leadership positions and in congregtions using their birth names, and about their religious setting accepting women's use of their birth names. Both groups had very similar responses to affirming that women experience suspicion or rejection from colleagues and/or congregations, using less gender-bound language in church texts and hymnals, and in saying that there were no changes in language which were particularly offensive to them (about 82% from each group).

The priests saw more positive pressures on women who are in high levels of leadership and more than the brothers thought that women did not handle stress differently than men. However, both groups most often answered that they did not know how women experienced stress from institutional and personal pressure at work and how women handled work-related stress; on the former, 57% of the brothers and 41% of the priests answered that the effects on women were negative.

Insert Table 1 about here.

DISCUSSION

Except in a rare case, Roman Catholic priests have not had the experience of women in seminary nor in other religious leadership roles. Nuns, who are considered to be religious leaders by those in other denominations, are considered to belong to a special group of religious laity by their own church. Nuns and brothers are seen as non-priestly assistants to priests. Whatever was their point of reference, it was not from direct experience but drawn from their intellect and intuition. While they did not have the experience of women religious leaders, priests did not have the threat or challenge and any concomitant stress. Yet, perhaps due to awareness of groups such as the Women's Ordination Conference and the National Coalition of American Nuns, as well as Priests for Equality, priests are more sensitive to women's need to excel: it is to the ordained priesthood that some nuns and other women are now aspiring. This directly affects priests.

Since theirs is the sacramental role within religious leadership, they would be most likely to keep up with what is happening with women in their church: women's strivings, frustrations, and hopes. It is understandable why priests more than brothers, then, would show more sensitivity to the possibility that women may be treated as novelties in seminary, that women would have far less opportunity for recruitment interviews and hiring, and that women would be blamed for going

TABLE I

PRIESTS AND BROTHERS AND THE RELIGION AND STRESS QUESTIONNAIRE

	Priests (N=54)	Brothers (N=50)
1. Do you think women sense more need to excel than men?		
Yes	69.5	60.6
No	8.7	12.2
Don't Know/Neutral	21.7	27.3
2. What effect do you think being in a sexual minority has upon female seminarians, ministers, priests, and rabbis?		
Positive	7.0	0.0
Negative	53.5	63.3
Don't Know/Neutral	39.5	36.7
3. Do you have any experience of women being treated as a novelty to be tolerated in seminary?		
Yes	50.0	9.4
No	27.3	71.9
Don't Know/Neutral	22.7	18.8
4. Do women have equal opportunities for recruitment interviews and actual hiring on church/synagogue staffs?		
Yes	21.7	37.5
No	56.6	43.7
Don't Know/Neutral	21.7	18.8
5. What pressures do you think women feel who are in high levels of leadership?		
Positive	75.0	3.3
Negative	4.5	63.4
Don't Know/Neutral	20.5	33.3
6. Do you think women experience suspicion or rejection from colleagues and/or congregations?		
Yes	72.4	72.7
No	2.1	15.1
Don't Know/Neutral	25.5	12.1
7. Because they dare to be female leaders in a predominantly male enterprise, do you think they get blamed for going against the tide?		
Yes	60.0	50.0
No	20.0	28.2
Don't Know/Neutral	20.0	21.9
8. How do women experience stress from institutional and personal pressure at work?		
Positively	0.0	4.8
Negatively	40.7	57.1
Don't Know/Neutral	59.3	38.1
9. How do women handle work related stress?		
Positively	22.2	31.6
Negatively	3.7	10.5
Don't Know/Neutral	74.1	57.9

TABLE I

(Continued)

	Priests	Brothers
10. Do you think women handle stress differently than their male counterparts?		
Yes	30.8	48.0
No	69.2	52.0
11a. What do you think about using less gender-bound language in church/synagogue texts and hymnals?		
Positive	82.4	82.6
Negative	11.8	8.6
Don't Know/Neutral	5.9	8.7
11b. Do you plan to use more inclusive language for men and women when you work in your religious setting?		
Yes	91.0	100.0
No	9.1	0.0
Don't Know/Neutral	0.0	0.0
11c. Is there any change in language that is particularly offensive to you?		
Yes	55.1	47.8
No	41.4	43.4
Don't Know/Neutral	3.4	8.7
12a. What do you think and feel about women in ministry/rabbinate/congregation using their birth names?		
Positive	50.0	63.6
Negative	16.7	4.5
Don't Know/Neutral	33.3	31.8
12b. For women, would you prefer to use your birth name?		
Yes	16.7	0.0
No	33.3	0.0
Don't Know/Neutral	50.0	100.0
12c. Is your religious setting accepting of women using their birth name?		
Yes	59.1	63.2
No	0.0	0.0
Don't Know/Neutral	40.9	36.8

against tradition.

Brothers, perhaps because women in religious leadership roles would be less directly challenging or threatening to them than to priests, were able to see women's possible discomfort being a sexual minority as leaders in religion. This might also explain brothers willingness to use more inclusive language in their religious settings, about not feeling as much discomfort as the priests did with women's using their birth names, and in seeing their church as accepting these names. The problem of priests and brothers in understanding some of the issues which concern females of today, as reflected in the Religion and Stress Questionnaire, is that whenever their responses were in the most realistic and sensitive direction the level of response was just at 50% to 56% for at least five of the 16 items. The highest levels of response were in regard to women experiencing suspicion or rejection from colleagues and/or congregations (72%), using inclusive language in texts and hymnals (82%), and personally planning to use inclusive language (91% and 100%).

Women have a double-edged sword here: they may deeply resent the priests as representatives of the patriarchal system which has hampered their fullest expression of their personhood, while at the same time---if they are more than nominal Catholics---they must go to these very priests for pastoral counseling and spiritual advice. If priests sense that some of the females whom they initially counsel harbor much resentment towards the church and its male leadership, or if they realize that there are areas of women's lives for which they

have not received adequate pastoral counseling training, they may wish to have a consultant in counseling or psychotherapy or to refer such clients to counseling psychologists and psychotherapists. Of course, these resource people will be guided by the kind of nonsexist principles developed by the APA Division of Counseling Psychology (The Counseling Psychologist, 1979). Too, the priests and brothers may take steps to insure that future religious leaders have the opportunity to include more women's studies in their graduate and seminary programs. Brothers, in addition to being counselors and teachers of youth, especially males, will be influencing future men to develop in more egalitarian ways if they themselves are more understanding of females and of male-female dialogue.

A sampling of some of the responses of the priests and brothers is helpful in understanding their level of awareness to some of the potential areas of stress of women and men to women's---and men's---issues of today. A 64 year old priest, stating that women have equal opportunities, added, "but usually women are accepted in all but positions of clergymen." In a strange way, then, he seemed to think that denying women the highest level of church participation, the most influential level, gives women equal access. A priest, 35, said, "Years ago, I'd say 'no,' but it's been my experience that this is more and more true, even to the point of many staff actively looking for more and more qualified and lay religious women to serve on their staffs." He was seeing recent recruitment and hiring improvements as proof of equal access by women. However, to have equal opportunities for recruitment and hiring would be just part of the battle won; it would not mean equal access amd at all levels of employment for women.

As to whether women handle stress differently than men do, a 61 year old priest responded, "Most women are able to express their feelings more readily than men." Agreeing with this position, a priest, 35, stated, "Most women are able to talk about their feelings while most men keep feelings inside and can hide behind the rules."

On those items, a brother, 26, said that he doubted that women had equal access, but that they seemed to be making "remarkable inroads to staffs, even though religion tend to be traditional and hire men for staffs." A brother, 44, saw the situation for women as getting better but still being unequal: "The chaplain at our all male home for boys is a woman. It has always been a priest (before)." As to whether women handle stress differently than men, a brother, 44, said, "oftentimes women will take stress more personally and respond to it from that aspect. Perhaps the response carries a reaction leading to the intuitive rather than the sensate." A brother, 56, stated, "Yes. I don't really know, but they do not seem to need as much pyhsical exercise." A brother, 41, commented, "Women tend to show stress more." Another brother, 34, noted, "Yes, at times they are more irritable. They hold on to too many hurts."

Further Implications for Counseling and Psychotherapy:

There is well-documented research to substanciate that seminaries do not provide a very fertile ground for the development of good counseling and psychotherapy skills (Dittes, 1962; Virkler, 1979, 1980) though those in seminary may have a strong need to acquire good counseling skills and to better

understand themselves and others (Rayburn, 1985). Many seminaries are sadly lacking in even one course in the psychology of women. Further, psychology and psychotherapy on one hand and religion and pastoral counseling on the other have not been very trusting or sharing with each other (Rayburn, 1983). An overview of women and stress would be beneficial to the male religious leaders (Rayburn, 1986).

It is suggested that, in order to aid religious leaders in increasing their awareness of gender issues, the Religion and Stress Questionnaire or a similar device be given to these individuals, along with questionnaires such as the Religious Vocabulary Checklist and the Importance of Counseling Inventory Rayburn, 1985). Becoming more knowledgeable of their own biases, they will be able to more easily dispell their mythologies about gender and to better work through these difficulties for themselves and then to be more effective pastoral counselors and spiritual advisors for others.

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